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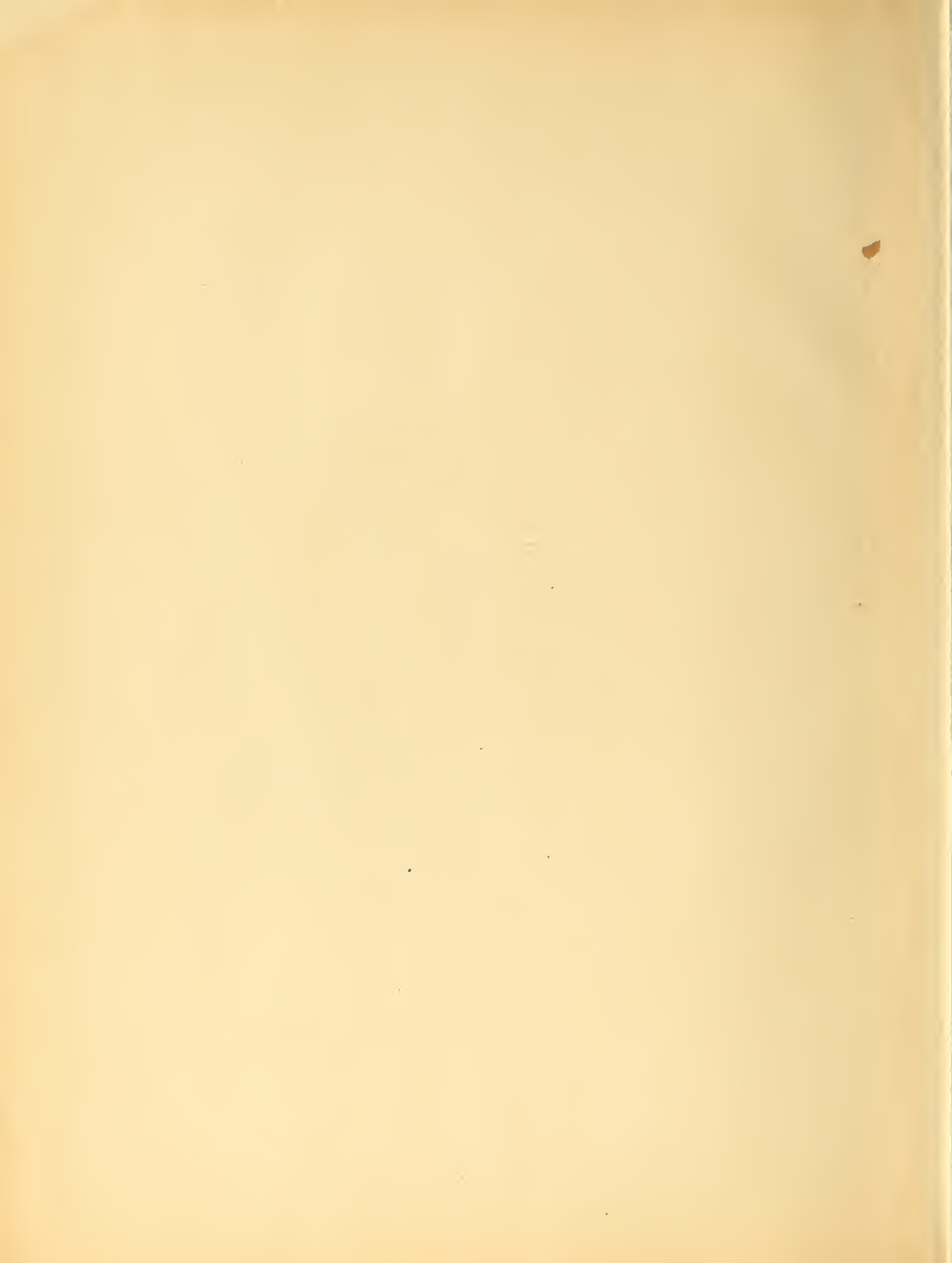
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AN EARNEST LIFE.

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Elizabeth J. Stone



MRS. ELIZABETH J. STONE

SKETCH

BY

HELEN WALDO BURNSIDE

WASHINGTON, D. C.
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NOTE.—In describing the homes of the Stone family, the author of this sketch has drawn somewhat from an article written by herself, a few years since, for the *Evening Star* of Washington.

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E. J. S.

MARCH 2, 1804

AUGUST 3, 1892

WASHINGTON, D. C.

“Thrice blest whose lives are faithful prayers.”

On the second of March, 1804, nearly ninety years ago, when Washington must have seemed almost a part of the surrounding wilderness, a little girl, Elizabeth Jane Lenthall, was born here at the Lenthall homestead, on F street. This child, so well known to the Washington of to-day as Mrs. Elizabeth J. Stone, passed her long, gracious, and beneficent life in this city, where she died on the third of August, 1892.

Mrs. Stone's maternal grandfather was Robert King, a surveyor of note in England, who came here with his family in 1797, and was made surveyor of Washington when it existed as a city only on maps and charts. He afterwards returned to England, where he died, but his daughter, Jane King, who had become the wife of Mr. John Lenthall, remained in Washington, as did the two sons, Nicholas and Robert King, Jr., both of whom were surveyors of eminence, the latter holding, after his father, the position of surveyor of the city.

The death of Robert King, Sr., occurred many years ago, but the portrait of his strong, kind face, with earnest eyes looking through the big, round glasses, is familiar to many Washingtonians of to-day. This portrait was painted by Jackson, a member of the Royal Academy, once a poor lad, whom the benevolent Earl of Mulgrave befriended and, with the

assistance of his friend Robert King, educated. When the boy became an artist, in loving proof of gratitude to his two benefactors, he painted for Lord Mulgrave this portrait of Robert King, which was afterwards sent to the American branch of the King family.

Mrs. Stone's father, John Lenthall, was also of English birth, and the great-grandson of Sir William Lenthal, who was Master of the Rolls, 1645; a Commissioner of the Great Seal, 1646, and Speaker of the House of Commons.

Mr. John Lenthall was a prominent citizen in the Washington of his day, and was, for the last years of his life, assistant architect of the original Capitol building, under Mr. Benjamin Latrobe. During the frequent and prolonged absences of Mr. Latrobe from Washington the direction of the entire work at the Capitol rested on Mr. Lenthall. The simple

living of those times, as well as the confidence and esteem which existed between Mr. Latrobe and Mr. Lenthall, the "Clerk of the Works of the Public Buildings of the United States Capitol," as he was frequently addressed by Mr. Latrobe, is shown by the letters, carefully preserved by the family, which passed between them. These letters were sometimes sent under cover to the President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, and one of them, dated September 2, 1807, is endorsed thus :

"Th. Jefferson presents his compliments to Mr. Lenthall, and sends him a letter this moment received, inclosed from Mr. Latrobe ; being handed him among his own, he broke it open without looking at the superscription ; but seeing Mr. Lenthall's name at the head of it, he closed it instantly, and assures him on his honor that he did not read one other word in it.

" Sunday evening."

Mr. Lenthall lost his life on the nineteenth of September, 1808, in the old rotunda of the Capitol, by the falling of an arch from which

the supports had, against his advice, been prematurely removed.

Thus early orphaned of their father, the three young children of the King-Lenthall family, the little Elizabeth and a brother and sister, were trained up in simple, thorough, earnest ways by a mother of rare intelligence and refinement. In that early day, when the best teaching was difficult of attainment, this mother, aided by her brothers, Nicholas and Robert King, succeeded in giving her children not only a thorough but a finished education. A deep love for reading and study was early formed in all three, and so developed, then and in after life, that they always found themselves interested in and abreast of the best thought of the day.

The brother, John Lenthall, became a Constructor in the U. S. Navy, and when retired from active service, at the age of sixty-two, was

Chief of the Bureau of Construction and Repair, Navy Department, Washington, with the relative rank of Commodore. He was always distinguished by his thorough and exact methods in all the details of his profession, and by his unswerving integrity in fulfilling all its duties.

The oldest daughter, Mary King Lenthall, showing a decided talent for painting and drawing, as well as for music, became an artist of no slight ability, sketching from nature with much skill. During the last years of her life, after she had suffered a stroke of paralysis by which her right hand lost its cunning, she began to draw and paint with her left, and adapting herself without a murmur to the new order of enforced inaction, in a condition so helpless as to have convinced any but the most courageous soul that all the work and all the pleasure of life were over, to the amazement of her friends she thus made, both in water-colors and oils, several

exquisite pictures of the flowers which were brought in to brighten her room

And dear "Aunt Mary Lenthall," as she was lovingly called by many who could claim no tie of kinship, won this victory over disease and failing strength when she was more than eighty-two years old. Those whose blessed fortune it was to be admitted to that quiet, upper room, the room which looked out over the old garden where the sisters and brother had played in childhood and had dreamed in youth, the garden made precious by a host of tender memories, will never forget the vision of beautiful old age presented by the venerable, white-haired woman, so nearly helpless, but still happily and cheerfully interested in her work and success as an artist.

Under the rectorship of the Reverend Charles H. Hall, now of Trinity Church, Brooklyn, in 1857, Miss Lenthall organized, and for years

taught, the infant class in the Sunday-school of Epiphany Church, Washington. Besides this, she long had charge of a sewing-school for mission work on Saturday mornings, to which many mothers sent their children, that they might come under the gracious influence of the gentle teacher. During the last, long illness, when speech had become so difficult that persons of mature years often failed to catch her meaning, the little three years old daughter of one of these former scholars was brought to see dear "Aunt Mary Lenthall," in the hope that the child might be allowed to share the love of that tender heart. Afterwards, one anxious to know how the interview had fared asked, "Did you see Aunt Mary? What did she say?" The child stopped, with a visible effort to recall the words which had been spoken, and while the little face brightened with the recollection of the interview, so impressive even to the baby

mind, replied, "Yes, I saw Aunt Mary. She say-d she would *love* little children, and I say-d *yes!*" The aged saint and the prattling infant had met, and recognized, each in the other, a kindred soul. Truly, of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Elizabeth Lenthall was early married to Mr. William James Stone, who was born in London, but who came to the United States in childhood, and was for the greater part of his life a resident of Washington. By his strong and upright character Mr. Stone won the respect of all with whom he came in contact. He was by profession an engraver, not only of skill but of distinction. He filled many important contracts for the Government, and his business in all its branches was an extended and lucrative one.

It was always pleasant to hear Mrs. Stone speak of the early days of her married life,

showing her helpful interest in her husband's work and aims. She would sometimes display with pride a map of Washington engraved by herself, in 1833, from actual surveys laid out on the ground by her two uncles, Nicholas and Robert King, Jr. This map shows with accuracy the topographical features of Washington sixty years ago, with its hills still prominent, its valleys not yet brought up to grade, and the little Tiber flowing back and forth across Pennsylvania avenue.

What interesting memories of the Washington of that date, and earlier, were Mrs. Stone's! She used to tell how, in 1814, she and her brother and sister were put into a cart and carried off by night to the Holmead farm, on Mount Pleasant, for safety during the occupancy of Washington by the British. In early childhood the three children used to attend school in a little house which

stood on the site of the present National Hotel, tripping gaily along by country paths which led through the huckleberry bushes by the side of the road, which we to-day know as Pennsylvania avenue. Later, the two sisters went for drawing lessons to a room in an unfinished building connected with the White House, and just east of it, which was afterwards converted into stables for the presidential mansion. Here they were taught by a Mr. André, one of the foreign artists employed by the Government.

During some years of their early married life, while Mr. Stone was actively engaged in business, and Washington was still a village in everything but name, and Pennsylvania avenue but little other than a country street, the family lived in the centre of the town, occupying several different houses owned by Mr. Stone, some of which

have for years been landmarks of the older Washington.

Four children, a daughter and three sons, were born to Mr. and Mrs. Stone, who, in mutual love and confidence, gave their best thought and their most earnest efforts to the training and education of their young family. They did not, however, forget others who might need their aid, but systematically followed out the methods of far-reaching but unobtrusive kindness and benevolence which they had adopted in their earliest married life, and into which they were accustomed to put such personal interest and sympathy for those they were benefiting that, whether their gifts came in the form of money or other timely aid, the most sensitive souls never felt that they had received charity.

It was not many years before Mr. Stone

bought a tract of land for a home outside the city limits, on Mount Pleasant, as all the high plateau just north of the city boundary, and running from Kalorama to Seventh street, was originally called.

It is interesting to know that this purchase included a part of the Holmead manor, to which Mrs. Stone and her sister and little brother had been carried in the night for refuge, during the war of 1812-'14. The original name of the farm was retained, and the country home of the Stones, with its broad outlook over the growing city close below it, the shining river beyond, and farther still away the Virginia hills fading blue in the distance, was fitly known as "Mount Pleasant." About 1840 the solid, beautiful manor-house was built, which was to be the home of the family for years. It stood close to what is now Thirteenth street extended, and is the present

city home of Mrs. Logan. As originally constructed, this house had an east and a west wing, which stood back of and a little apart from the main building, with which both were connected by halls below and galleries above. These galleries, with their heavy mahogany balustrades, and their stairways leading from either side to the main, broad staircase in the centre, and so to the hall below, were a striking feature of the house as originally constructed. Mr. Stone, who possessed a decided taste for art, which the leisure of his mature years gave him ample opportunity to cultivate, provided for a picture gallery and studio in one of the wings. Here his favorite avocation, in which he attained much skill, was modeling in clay and plaster.

The children of the Stone family received an education in every sense of the word liberal. The oldest son, Robert King, afterwards the

well known and much beloved Dr. Stone, who was the family physician of President Lincoln, and by his bedside during the awful hours which succeeded the assassination, and the next born, William James Stone, Jr., who became a prominent member of the Washington bar, after completing their college life, made an extended tour of Europe—a finishing and broadening process which was considered less essential, and which was certainly far less easily attainable, forty years ago than now. Jane, the only daughter, married Colonel James W. Abert, of the U. S. Army, and died in early womanhood, leaving one child, a son, who spent his youth in the home of his grandparents. George, the youngest son, died in Philadelphia before completing his course in medicine. Portraits of this child as an infant, and of the daughter in her early girlhood, were painted by Mr. Asher Durand, at the

time he was painting the portrait of President Van Buren, at the White House, and made his home with his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Stone. This portrait of the little boy, together with a bust of Mr. Stone by the artist Powers, both interesting examples of the original work of two of the prominent artists of our country, were some years ago presented by Mrs. Stone to the Corcoran Art Gallery. The sweet face of the young girl is now treasured in the family of her only son, after having looked down in smiling peace upon the changes of many years from the wall of the pleasant library in Mrs. Stone's last Washington home.

This home, 609 Fourteenth street, built by Mr. Stone while living at Mount Pleasant, was occupied, soon after its completion, by Jefferson Davis, then Secretary of War, and here little Samuel, the eldest born child of that family, died. After Mr. Davis gave up the house it

was held untenanted until the Stone family came to occupy it. This happened in 1859, and in 1861 the estate at Mount Pleasant was entirely and voluntarily given up for the use of the soldiers, no compensation having ever been desired or received from the Government in return. From this time the Fourteenth-street house was the home of Mrs. Stone.

During the years of the family life here the doors of this home were ever wide open to receive the neighbors, the friends from far and near, or the strangers who claimed its hospitality. Here the beloved children and children's children delighted to gather, and later the bright group of great-grandchildren, "starting like sudden spring," came to lend the grace and brightness of childhood to the dear familiar rooms. While living here Mrs. Stone was blessed with some of her greatest joys, and here she doubtless endured her keenest sor-

rows, passing through all with a serenity which sprang from her native, gentle dignity, and which was elevated and strengthened by her unflinching trust in the good providence of God, which she believed to be ever about her. In 1865 her husband died in this home, and she entered upon her long widowhood, which was to last nearly thirty years.

Some years before, Mrs. Stone's eyesight had become seriously impaired by a disease which progressed steadily, in spite of all that medical skill could do to check its progress, until finally she who loved to read, who was most skilful in the use of her pen, an adept in dainty needlework, and who delighted in all the routine of household duty, was compelled to live in almost total darkness. Even under this trial her serenity did not forsake her. As a child, musing in the old home garden, she believed she heard a voice from the infinite

space saying to her, "The greatest thing in the world is the grace of God;" and that grace, which she had early striven to make her own, was her support in these severe trials of her mature life. Instead of brooding in selfish discontent over her own afflictions, her heart went out in love to all the world, a love to which her unceasing efforts to help and benefit others abundantly testified.

Her two married sons, her last remaining children, had died, one having been snatched away suddenly, without a moment's warning; but the loving mother bore this trial in a spirit of uncomplaining resignation, while her sympathy for the sorrows of others seemed to grow broader and deeper from the very keenness of her own.

God had blessed her with abundant means, and, following out her life-long habit of systematic benevolence, she made her bene-

factions generous and many. But what added to their value was the love which always went with them.

When the estate of her father, John Lenthall, was divided, a large lot of ground on the corner of Nineteenth and G streets, in the northwestern part of Washington, fell to the share of Mrs. Stone, who was then but four years old. This property was allowed to remain unimproved for years, until, coming to maturity, she could herself decide what disposition should be made of it. She married, reared children, buried them, became a widow, and still this land, which was located in one of the most desirable parts of Washington, remained unused, Mrs. Stone having years before determined that it should be devoted to some benevolent purpose, in memory of her father, from whom she had inherited it.

In the year 1883 she carried out her design by giving this land as a site for a home for widows of the church in Washington; to further this purpose she gave also the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, fifteen thousand of which was to be used to build this home, the remaining ten to be invested, and the income therefrom to be appropriated to its repair, maintenance, or enlargement. True to her original intention, in memory of her father, dead long years before, she named this institution "The Lenthall Home."

Being advanced in years, and desiring to secure able and trustworthy direction for this home, the prosperity of which she had so much at heart, Mrs. Stone placed it in charge of the rector and vestry of the Church of the Epiphany in Washington as trustees.

According to the plan of the founder,

each inmate of the home has a separate and comfortable apartment of three rooms, for which she pays a small rent monthly, this course having been adopted by Mrs. Stone in order that each might enjoy that feeling of personal independence which the payment of a small rent would secure.

All the arrangements of this home speak the personal thought of its founder for those who should occupy it. For instance, she said to a friend, "I wanted the inside blinds because I could not bear to think that those who were to live in the Lenthall Home would be compelled to reach out on cold and perhaps stormy nights to close outside shutters; they might be old and feeble, you know. I couldn't do it, and I shouldn't want them to."

It was always thus with the benefactions of this loving soul; whether small or great,

the spirit of the giver doubled the value of the gifts. And her affectionate memory reached back over such long years! She did not say, "Mrs. Blank, whom I knew in girlhood, is in feeble health, and being poor I will send her something." But no; "When we drive to-day I will go to see her; she used to know sister and me well; it will be pleasant to talk over old times together. We shall both enjoy it," and it would be evident that both did.

And so it was even to her latest years, when increasing infirmities would well have excused her from all effort, did Mrs. Stone hear of some poor soul in need and sorrow she would go herself, and so cheer the lonely heart by her sympathetic presence that the gift she might leave behind would seem but secondary to the better blessing of personal comfort and sympathy. She had

taken the sufferer's hand, had shown her belief in a common sisterhood, her faith in the fatherhood of God—and yet Mrs. Stone preached no sermons excepting those which found utterance in the daily beauty of her gentle life.

In 1886 Miss Lenthall, who had grown very feeble, left the old homestead on F street, and came to reside with Mrs. Stone, and from that time on the lives of the two sisters were passed under the same roof. Always united in their aims, they greatly enjoyed the close companionship which now became possible. One never rivaled but each aided the other in her works of love and mercy. Whether they were interested in packing a box for an unknown clergyman's family, or for a personal friend in a far away State, where, it would be gently explained, things cannot be bought so readily as in Washington, the interest and care to

have all as it should be were unabated. They would frequently send boxes of books and clothing to the scholars in the Indian schools of Wisconsin, Minnesota, or more distant Dakota; or it might be that a generous gift in money would go to these wards of the nation, with a message of love from one or both sisters, while grateful letters of thanks would come back to say how the gifts were welcomed. The teachers in these schools were often asked what their pupils most needed, and when the generous boxes would afterwards be received, many a little heart would be gladdened by finding therein the long coveted book or garment. The two sisters realized the value of self-help, and when they learned that the little scholars were busy with any especial kind of work would send abundant materials, often cut and basted for their use. Then the little brown fingers would perhaps toil to make

a marvelous pair of slippers, or moccasins, to be sent back to their kind but unknown benefactors.

The sisters had the work of the church among the colored people also much at heart, and endeavored to aid it by the same helpful methods they followed in regard to the scholars of the Indian schools. Books, money, garments were given with generous hands, the latter being often painstakingly cut and basted, so that the mothers might see how to do things in the best way for their little ones, and in order to give more aid to the teachers, who, it was felt, had many times far too much on their hands.

From one of these schools in the South for the training of colored children came back a picture of scholars and teachers in a group, which one dear sister could not see, and which failing speech made it impossible for the other

to talk of, but both were made happy by the gift, one listening while some kind voice described the happy picture, and the face of the other glowing as she looked and exclaimed in faltering words, "Ah, yes; so comfortable, so good!"

But it was not far away churches or schools or people only who were aided by Mrs. Stone and her sister. They dearly loved to help those near home who stood in need. St. Luke's Church, the Garfield Hospital, and many other churches and institutions in Washington, and not far distant, were the recipients of their thoughtful gifts. As a friend once said, no one ever asked Mrs. Stone for help—no one ever had a chance; she had only to learn that this or that was needed, and it came. As eyesight failed her, she resorted more and more to her knitting when she wished to make a gift which she knew would

be prized as the work of her hands. She knitted flags, counterpanes, wristlets, muffs, reins for little children, and a friend found her one day hard at work on a mitten for a driver of one of the street-cars; this mitten to be padded in the palm, because he had hurt his hand with the brake. Did she know him? Oh, no; but some one had told her how it was, and she hoped to help him a little in this way.

And all this personal effort and care, and toil even, on the part of a frail, aged woman, whose gifts in money to every good work were so generous and so constant as to make any but one who had learned the true joy of serving feel that her duty was fulfilled without this personal exertion.

And so the peaceful, helpful life went on in the home on Fourteenth street. The noise and rush and tumult of the city came nearer and nearer, but within all was

unchanged. Strangers were struck on entering this home by the air of solid comfort, of dignity and repose which pervaded all its ample space, while the wide hall, the high ceilings, and the large windows, the same characteristics which impress one in the Logan home, bespoke the guiding spirit of the same builder. Over the grassy garden, which hides behind its high brick walls, there rested an air of unbroken quiet and repose, in peaceful contrast to the busy street without. From the north window of the entrance hall, at the foot of the staircase, even casual callers could catch a glimpse of this sheltered spot, with its climbing vines, its waving trees, and its pathetic statue in the centre.

And if the spirit of this dear home thus impressed those who came and went almost as strangers, what can be said of its influ-

ence on those bound by the tenderest ties of kinship to its gentle mistress, and on those others, not a few, who through long years of familiar intercourse found in her a friend unfailing in patience, abundant in sympathy, and wise in counsel?

In the spring of 1892 it became evident that the life of Miss Lenthall was nearing its close, and that another great sorrow would soon overshadow the home of Mrs. Stone. This beloved sister died on the third of May, 1892, when she lacked but a few weeks of being ninety years old, the aged saint who was to survive yet a little longer bearing this last bereavement with the same gentle, Christian resignation which had characterized her in all the sorrows of her earlier years. Her own hold on life became each day more feeble, but while increasing pain tortured the wasted frame

her heavenly patience and fortitude did not forsake her, and her gentle courtesy toward all about her was unflinching, although the thought of the sufferings so heroically endured by this frail woman wrung many a loving heart through these last, long months. All knew how in the solitude of her increasing deafness, and almost total blindness, the great heart was still filled with love for all the world; knew, too, how every respite from agonizing pain was embraced as an opportunity to help and bless others, and how, while life and strength were so fast ebbing away, she seemed but the more eager to obey the apostolic command, "While we have time, let us do good unto all men."

Even in these last hours her sympathy was as quick as of old for the joys as well as for the sorrows of her friends, one of her last acts being the selection of a

wedding gift for a young clergyman, formerly of Washington, whom she had always held in affectionate regard. It was touching to hear the old, familiar tone in the voice, as in a brief respite from pain she eagerly asked the day of the month, spoke of the wedding, and gave directions for sending the gift.

In a few hours thereafter she passed the line of conscious suffering, and fell asleep—to waken no more here; this life, which had been so fraught with unselfish blessings for the lives of others, ending on the third of August, 1892.

In the quiet sunset light of a summer's day Mrs. Stone was buried beside her husband and children, from the Rock Creek parish church, which had been the place of worship of her family during the happy life at "Mount Pleasant." As suggested by the tender words

of consolation spoken by the rector, who, during the nearly forty years of his ministry at this church, had been the fast friend of Mrs. Stone, recalling her deep but unobtrusive piety, her boundless sympathy for the unfortunate and the sorrowful, her countless works of charity and mercy, let us remember this beloved friend as our Saint Elizabeth.

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